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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAKU 001266

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [IR](#) [AJ](#)
SUBJECT: AZERBAIJANI OPPOSITION POLITICIAN TAKES ON ISSUE
OF ETHNIC AZERIS IN "SOUTH AZERBAIJAN"

REF: A. (A) BAKU 758
[1](#)B. (B) BAKU 475

Classified By: DCM Jason P. Hyland for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Leader of the opposition Azerbaijan National Independence Party (ANIP) Etibar Mammadov plans to raise awareness of the plight of Iran's ethnic Azeri community. With hopes of raising the issue on both the national and international levels, Mammadov will hold an international conference on the topic of "South Azerbaijan" in Baku on September 12. Mammadov also speculated that the Iranian Government had orchestrated the May 2006 ethnic Azeri riots in Iran in order to gauge ethnic Azeri reaction in the event of a conflict with the West. The question of "South Azerbaijan" - the term used by Azeri nationalists to describe the areas of Iran inhabited primarily by ethnic Azeris - continues to be extremely sensitive for the governments of both Azerbaijan and Iran. Mammadov could be drawing attention to this issue to promote his own domestic political agenda in Azerbaijan. End summary.

Iranian Discrimination

[1](#)2. (C) Mammadov, a former Member of Parliament and history instructor at Baku State University, outlined what he characterized as a long history of discrimination against Iran's Azeri community. To do this, Mammadov cited examples ranging from the brutal suppression of ethnic Azeris under Reza Shah Pahlavi to the absence of Azerbaijani-language education, broadcasting, and cultural programs in today's Iran. Mammadov also paid special attention to the recent protests in May (sparked by the publication in Iranian newspapers of cartoons depicting ethnic Azeris as cockroaches - see ref a). When asked why he thought the newspapers published the cartoons, Mammadov felt that it was possible that it had to do with the Iranian regime's growing concern over an eventual confrontation with the international community over its nuclear program. In his view, the regime may have sparked the protests as a means by which to better gauge ethnic Azeri discontent in the event of a conflict with the international community.

Mammadov's Motivations...

[1](#)3. (C) While stating that he was sympathetic to the GOAJ's difficult position with respect to the ethnic Azeri issue in Iran, Mammadov nonetheless expressed a strong interest in bringing the issue to the forefront of his political activities. Asked to explain the motivation behind his

newfound interest in the plight of Iran's ethnic Azeris, Mammadov stated that he was driven by profound sympathy for their situation and a desire to focus on the kind of issues affecting the day-to-day lives of average Azerbaijanis (note: it is unclear how this issue affects the daily lives of average Azerbaijanis). Mammadov also stated that beyond raising awareness in Azerbaijan, he hoped to draw international attention to this issue by holding a conference on "South Azerbaijan" in Baku on 12 September. His selection of such a politically-charged name for this conference (note - "South Azerbaijan" is the name commonly used by Azeri nationalists within both Iran and Azerbaijan to describe the areas of Iran inhabited primarily by ethnic Azeris) is sure to attract attention both domestically and internationally. As the planning for this conference was still ongoing, Mammadov provided few other insights beyond the fact that he was inviting a number of figures from Azerbaijan and abroad to participate.

Broadcasts into Iran?

¶4. (C) Concluding the meeting, Mammadov urged the U.S. to expand U.S.-sponsored broadcasting into Iran, especially in the Azerbaijani language. Mammadov believed that the U.S. was missing an opportunity to communicate directly with the Iranian people, and indicated that our message would be eagerly received.

The Politics of the Azeri Question

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¶5. (C) COMMENT: Mammadov was one of the leading figures of Azerbaijan's national independence movement and has been an outspoken member of the opposition since Heydar Aliyev's ascendancy to power. He lost a bid for Parliament in 2005 and, since then, has struggled to retain leadership in his own party. His push to raise a high-profile, emotional issue could be an effort to reignite his political career. However, given the recent political standoff with Iran over critical remarks made at the Second Congress of World Azerbaijanis in Baku (ref b), the GOAJ will likely watch Mammadov's initiative very carefully. Post will also continue to monitor the issue closely. END COMMENT.
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